

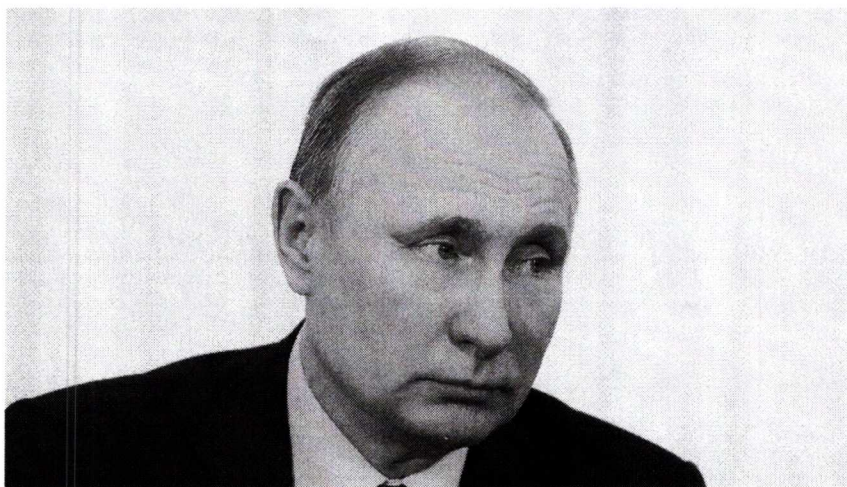
State Department's answer to Russian meddling is about to be funded | ...

<https://www.khou.com/article/news/nation-now/state-departments-answ...>

NATION NOW

## State Department's answer to Russian meddling is about to be funded

State's answer to Russian meddling is about to be funded



Credit: Mikhail Klimentyev, AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during a meeting with the finalists of the national contest of managers Leaders of Russia in the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on Feb. 12, 2018.

Author: Oren Dorell (USA TODAY)

Published: 2/9/2018 9:10:14 AM

Updated: 3:32 PM CST February 15, 2018



IN OTHER NEWS

**Kate Upton's vintage Houston Astros jacket sells out**

WASHINGTON — The State Department is only now getting started to combat Russian meddling in U.S. politics, even as intelligence officials warn of threats to the 2018 midterm elections.

An agreement to transfer \$40 million from the Defense Department to State's Global Engagement Center is expected to be approved this week to counter Russian influence that began before the 2016 presidential election, said Daniel Kimmage, the center's acting coordinator.

The center initially focused on countering terrorist propaganda, but Congress ordered it last August to add a new mission as well: election meddling by foreign governments.

The center's job "is to focus on the issue of disinformation, whether it comes from Russia or China or any other country," Steven Goldstein, the State Department undersecretary for public diplomacy, told reporters in January.

In an interview, however, Kimmage said senior leaders spend a third of their time on the



"counter-state mission," meaning mostly Russia. And the staff is primarily focused on counterterrorism efforts.

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats testified Tuesday that the Russian meddling campaign continues. "Throughout the entire (intelligence) community, we haven't seen any evidence of any significant change since last year," Coats told the Senate Select Intelligence Committee.

**More:** Information warriors: Here's how the U.S. is combating 'fake news' from Russia

**More:** 'The United States is under attack': Intelligence chief Dan Coats says Putin targeting 2018 elections

A Democratic report on the Russian influence campaign abroad said the center's efforts against Russia "have been stymied by the department's hiring freeze and unnecessarily long delays" in transferring funds to support that mission.

The new funding will more than double the center's resources, which is currently \$35 million, of which \$19.8 million is earmarked for countering Islamic State propaganda and the rest is aimed at counterterrorism overall. When funded, the center's added mission will be to coordinate U.S. government agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI, with allies and non-governmental organizations, to combat state-sponsored disinformation, primarily from Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

Russia's influence has been well documented in the U.S. and abroad.

During and since the 2016 presidential election, U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that hackers working for the Russian government used cyberattacks to undermine Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and help the prospects of Republican candidate Donald Trump. Special counsel Robert Mueller is investigating whether any collusion occurred between Trump's campaign and the Russians, and has charged four former campaign staffers.

**More:** The four people charged so far in Russia investigation

**More:** Yes, 17 intelligence agencies really did say Russia was behind hacking

Russian efforts to influence the U.S. political conversation continued last summer, by amplifying extremist voices on immigration, police brutality and racial issues. This winter they helped spread the campaign to release a memo by Republican House staffers about President Trump's allegations that he was wiretapped by the Obama administration.

In Europe, Russia has meddled in the affairs of more than two dozen countries since 2004, with alleged interference that ranges from cyberattacks to disinformation campaigns and an attempted coup in Montenegro.

**More:** Russia's pattern of meddling abroad exposes threat to 2018 U.S. elections: report

**More:** Alleged Russian political meddling documented in 27 countries since 2004

The center was created in 2016 by President Barack Obama to counter extremist propaganda and disinformation produced by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. To date that remains its first priority.

The new State Department effort will adapt some approaches to counterterrorism to the counter Russian work, and provide research-based best practices to U.S. agencies and allies.

In interviews with USA TODAY, Kimmage and his deputies at the center described combining modern advertising tools for reaching specific target audiences with research from around the

world on successful approaches to countering Islamic State and al-Qaeda propaganda.

The research is shared with other agencies, including the military, and with partners that can implement various methods in places such as Iraq, Egypt and South Asia.

That approach will be adapted for the center's new mission, which will focus primarily on Russia, Kimmage said.

**More:** Russian Twitter accounts push #releasethememo conservative meme, researchers say

**More:** Twitter removed 200 Russian accounts that targeted Facebook users during election

**More:** Breitbart, other 'alt-right' websites are the darlings of Russian propaganda effort

Some of that work has already begun, Kimmage and Goldstein told USA TODAY.

Top managers have been working with other government agencies, the White House and technology companies, "encouraging them to help us in this fight," Goldstein said.

He met with executives from Google in January, Twitter in February, and plans to meet with Facebook, he said. They discussed shutting down "bots" — thousands of automated accounts that spew misleading information — and to speed up the removal of posts and videos that target U.S. audiences to recruit terrorists, disrupt American society or spread ads to influence U.S. politics.

And the center is working to combat efforts by Iran to block their citizens' access to truthful information, and propaganda efforts by China and North Korea.

"There's no question that Russia has tried to spread disinformation, but they are not the only one," Goldstein said.

### Here Are 29 of the Coolest Gifts for This 2022

29 Insanely Cool Gadgets You'll Regret Not Getting Before They Sell Out

Trending Gifts | Sponsored

[Click Here](#)

### The most relaxing farm game of 2022. No Install

Enjoy farming, stock up and make friends. Taonga is a whole world full of adventure!

Taonga: The Island Farm | Sponsored

[Play Now](#)

### Roofers Tested 17 Gutter Guards... Here's What They Discovered

The Actual Cost of Gutter Guards in 2022 May Surprise You

LeafFilter Partner | Sponsored

[Learn More](#)

State Department's answer to Russian meddling is about to be funded | ...

<https://www.khou.com/article/news/nation-now/state-departments-answ...>

### Here Are 23 of the Coolest Gifts for This 2022

23 Insanely Cool Gadgets You'll Regret Not Getting Before They Sell Out

CoolGifts | Sponsored

[Learn More](#)

### This New CPAP Can Do What...

AirSense 11: The World's Newest And Most Advanced CPAP

The Easy Blog by EasyBreathe.com | Sponsored

### Here Are 23 Of The Coolest Gifts For 2022

23 Hottest Cool Gifts In 2022 You'll Regret Not Getting Before They Sell Out

Best Tech Trend | Sponsored

### Court records reveal bloody scene at home of Humble mom, son who went missing

KHOU

### Cypress twins say they were forced to drink bleach, burned, beaten with curtain rods

KHOU

LOADING NEXT ARTICLE...



State Department's answer to Russian meddling is about to be funded | ... <https://www.khou.com/article/news/nation-now/state-departments-answ...>